# Theory Advocate

## Shell

1. Interpretation: Every theory interpretation must be warranted with a card, written by an author who has publicly defended the position. To clarify, the violation needs to be a similar kind of strategy to what the author has indicted—the text of the interpretation doesn’t have to be verbatim the author’s writing.

#### Overing explains Palmer[[1]](#footnote-1)

Chris Palmer has suggested that “every [theory] interpretation should be warranted with a card.” The basic idea is that just like a plan or counterplan, [it] every theory argument should have a solvency advocate, a[n] qualified author who has publicly defended the position. I think it’s interesting and fun proposal, and I’m surprised I haven’t seen it as a meta-theory argument this year. In this post, I’ll address Palmer’s arguments for and against it, propose some of my own, and also digress about whether theory is exclusionary.

1. Violation: You don’t. You’re not your own advocate—you have not defended this position on a publicly accessible forum outside of the context of a debate round.
2. The standard is debate scholarship: My interp encourages out-of-round discussion of debate and limits theory generally to only high quality theory—bad arguments are weeded out through community scrutiny. Poor theory causes generics, lack of clash, and shallow debate. Norms like disclosure that arose from published arguments show it works.

#### Overing[[2]](#footnote-2)

Palmer says that requiring theory advocates would encourage public discussion of theory and therefore, the formation of communal argument norms. The link level of the argument rings true to me. If every theory argument required a theory advocate, far more coaches and debaters would have an incentive to talk about theory online or in various debate journals and magazines. Insofar as these people care about the content of debates, they would want their view represented so it could be effectively leveraged in-round. Given the paucity of coaches and judges who write publicly about debate, this effect is hard to predict or quantify with any certainty, but if it could happen, I’m definitely in favor. Not enough people are talking about debate in policy or LD. People in the college policy community blame the fact that more and more coaches are ‘hired guns’ who don’t have or aren’t pursuing graduate degrees in communication. Their goal is to win, not to study debate or debate scholarship. In [my talk at the 2015 Alta Conference on Argumentation](http://premierdebatetoday.com/2015/11/14/recovering-the-role-of-the-ballot-by-bob-overing/), I lamented the lack of scholarly attention to debate. There are just a few bloggers, a few publishing master’s theses, and a few who consistently talk debate theory at these communication conferences. But there are thousands of people in our community! Overall, it seems there were more people publishing on hypothesis testing in the 1980s. This is astonishing to me given the rapid changes in policy debate in the last 10 years that are trickling into LD. We’re seeing huge shifts in argument content and structure that should be far more interesting to scholars and coaches than old disputes over agent counterplans and the like. […] All of these complicate the debate round as the best method for creating the best norms. Instead, we should encourage more lively online discussion to weed out bad arguments and promote good ones. An example of this process includes the way many published arguments in favor of evidence disclosure have helped promote its adoption as a norm in LD.

And, the advantages here are unique to out-of-round discussion: a) competitive pressures and time limits of a round hinder meaningful discussion, b) good debaters may win rounds with bad arguments, which doesn’t produce good scholarship, c) the scrutiny of a community rather than a single judge, who often makes mistakes, ensures the better norm prevails, and d) unlike online discussions, rounds aren’t public, so debaters aren’t held accountable for the arguments they put forward. Debate scholarship controls the internal link to every other theory impact—every debate argument and round is contextualized by the community and its existing norms, scholarship, and resources.

And, we should assume interpretations as norms (theory is about producing the best norms): norm-setting outweighs on time frame, since otherwise each interp is round-specific—overall as norms become established, we have less theory debates overall.

Cross apply their voters – and meta-theory comes first since it questions the viability of their shells – if I don’t have access to justify my practices it in the first place, those abuse stories are meaningless.

## More standards

1. Predictability

Having an advocate ensures greater predictability. If there’s an advocate, it’s in the literature, and therefore debaters could have prepared for it. Otherwise all theory is ex-post facto because the violator had no opportunity to comply with the rule—allows for proliferation of frivolous theory.

1. Inclusion—promotes inclusion by making theory resources more accessible.

Overing[[3]](#footnote-3)

My second reason is another benefit to more online discussion: more resources for learning and teaching theory debate. There should be more resources for learning all types of debate, and Palmer’s proposal is especially good for proliferating resources to learn theory debate. Our [Debate for All series](http://premierdebatetoday.com/debate-for-all/) on this site is an attempt to provide more accessible content for learning debate concepts, but we can only do so much (We’re always happy to accept content from volunteer writers – contact us!). If the theory advocate requirement produces more free resources for students to learn theory, that’s great because it means more free resources!

1. Substantive debate—our interp limits theory generally, preserving only high quality theory. Poor theory causes generics, lack of clash, and shallow debate.

#### Palmer[[4]](#footnote-4)

That solves many of the harms above. It allows for rules to be fleshed out in an open arena, devoid of the competitive pressures, time limits and necessity to vote a round entails. It could be two competing theory interpretations are both wrong—a judge still must vote for one of them, but in an open forum, the audience may easily reject both. Therefore, bad rules or norms can be winnowed out. A good proposed norm will stand the scrutiny of many voices, while a harmful or spurious rule will quickly grow a list of arguments against it.

# Frontlines

**AT I meet, wikis count**

All of the offense relies on the sort of forum where the community can engage in the content. A defense of the interpretation is written, and there is a comment section where people can discuss—neither of those exist on wikis. The wiki is a database, not an article.

**AT I meet, I’m my own advocate**

The litmus test for an I meet is whether it solves the offense on the shell. All of the offense relies on the sort of forum where the community can engage in the content *outside* of the context of a round. A defense of the interpretation is written, and there is a comment section where people can discuss—neither of those exist when you claim to be you own advocate.

**AT Can’t solve for unpredictable abuse**

1. Interpretations could be more specific, tailored to a particular round but still meet the advocate requirement. Remember the violation needs to be a similar kind of strategy to what the author has indicted—the text of the interpretation doesn’t have to be verbatim the author’s writing.
2. No one is that unpredictable with their abuse anymore—people rarely extempt a shell entirely.
3. ( ) No reason why unpredictable abuse would require a combination of planks. If a debater does A and B, both of which are bad, that abuse can easily be addressed by reading two separate shells indicting each, each with their own advocate.

**AT Hurts creativity**

1. **Turn:** Innovation comes from thorough discussions—competitive pressures, time limits, and the necessity to vote all ensure that the kinds of theory debates that happen in-round have limited innovation, whereas a forum where real, constructive thinking and discussion takes place will encourage better forms of innovation.
2. Doesn’t harm innovation—it merely requires that innovation occurs outside of a debate round on a public forum first. Any debater interested in publishing a new idea can write a blog post—sites like Premier Debate prove large community interest in student submissions.

**AT Lack of published articles to cite**

1. That’s not true—there is so much literature in the history of academic debate that there’s hardly any issue you won’t be able to find an advocate for. Policy debate forums have covered virtually every policy-based theory issue.
2. Your interpretation doesn’t have to be precise to the author’s writing, shells predicated on the same *type* of abuse story that the author indicts would still meet the interpretation.

**AT Exclusive—coaches will write shit for their kids**

This isn’t a problem with my interpretation—it just means debate websites need to filter articles that are published with a competitive incentive. Instead they should only publish articles that are publically accessible and useful.

**AT Bias—judges hear their own cards**

1. This would rarely happen—at best, it’s marginal offense for you.
2. Judges don’t mind—ask Marshall, who hears his cards read in front of him all the time. We pref these judges because we perceive them to be tab.
3. Nonunique—judges have biases anyway, there’s no reason that would be heightened when the evidence read is written by them.

**AT Abusive debaters will frontline all published articles ever**

1. **Turn:** writing frontlines is a good form of scholarship—it deepens our understanding of issues.
2. Nonunique—we already frontline our arguments for all potential responses, for example we frontline every argument against the Aff in the literature.
3. **Turn:** it’s actually better if we frontline our arguments for responses published in the literature since otherwise we could only prep responses that we’ve encountered in rounds. Since some debaters debate far fewer rounds, my interp allows for equity in writing frontlines.

**AT Normsetting bad**

AT Debaters could read theory without a violation

No they couldn’t, because it wouldn’t be offense for them; theory always presumes a violation otherwise the shell is nonunique and the other debater doesn’t need to defend a counter-interp. The existence of clash between an interp and a counter-interp in a round presumes a violation, under norm-setting or otherwise.

**AT Judges would intervene**

Nonunique—judges concerned with norms would be equally concerned with theory arguments

People generally have intuitions about specific situations rather than broad norms. We don’t have intuitions about whether a particular theory interp is good or not until it’s been applied to a particular round.

**AT Empirically, little effect on norms**

This is actually empirically false—disclosure became a norm because people wrote articles in defense of it, and more and more debaters began reading disclosure theory.

1. Bob Overing. “Theory Advocates.” *Premier Debate.* 8 March 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bob Overing. “Theory Advocates.” *Premier Debate.* 8 March 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bob Overing. “Theory Advocates.” *Premier Debate.* 8 March 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chris Palmer. “A Theory of Theory.” *Azuen.net.* 3 March 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)